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Forest Certification – How the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Program Compares

As demand for certified products grows, respected organizations around the world are taking a closer look at third-party forest certification programs such as the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®). Independent SFI Inc. (www.sfiprogram.org) manages the largest single forest certification standard in the world. It improves forest management across the United States and Canada, and strengthens procurement globally through chain-of-custody certification and responsible fiber sourcing.

The following are from reports or discussions about SFI and other forest certification programs:

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe/Food and Agriculture Organization

From the 2009-2010 Forest Products Annual Market Review: "Over the years, many of the issues that previously divided the (certification) systems have become much less distinct. The largest certification systems now generally have the same structural programmatic requirements."¹

Dovetail Partners Inc.

From a 2010 status report on forest certification: "Significant changes have occurred within the major certification programs in recent years, and, in several ways, it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between certification systems in North America."²

National Association of State Foresters

From a policy statement passed by resolution in 2008: "While in different manners, the ATFS (American Tree Farm System), FSC (Forest Stewardship Council), and SFI systems include the fundamental elements of credibility and make positive contributions to forest sustainability. . . . No certification program can credibly claim to be 'best', and no certification program that promotes itself as the only certification option can maintain credibility."³

Central Point of Expertise on Timber (CPET)

The United Kingdom's Central Point of Expertise on Timber has confirmed the SFI program was among those that met its government's requirements for 'legality' and 'sustainability'.⁴

Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC)

Independent non-profit PEFC endorses national and/or regional forest certification standards that meet its rigorous criteria. In 2005, it endorsed the SFI forest standard after a thorough application, independent assessments and a public review process.⁵

Canadian Council of Forest Ministers

From a 2008 statement on forest certification standards in Canada: "Governments in Canada continue to provide technical and policy support to the ongoing development of certification in Canada. . . . Customers can be assured that these forest certification standards (Canadian Standards Associations, FSC and SFI) are complementary to and demonstrate each Government's sustainable forest management regime."⁶

¹2009-2010 Forest Products Annual Market Review Page 121 <http://timber.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/publications/sp-25.pdf>

² Forest Certification: A Status Report March 2010 <http://www.dovetailinc.org/files/DovetailCertReport0310b.pdf>

³National Association of State Foresters policy paper on forest certification www.stateforesters.org/node/1032

⁴Documents: Review of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative <http://www.cpet.org.uk/documents>

⁵ Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes www.pefc.org/index.php

⁶ Canadian Council of Forest Ministers Statement on Forest Certification Standards in Canada http://www.ccfm.org/pdf/CCFM_Statement_FRandEN.pdf#page=2

The Competition Bureau of Canada

Environmental Claims: A Guide for Industry and Advertisers says a preferred approach to claims of sustainability is: "This wood comes from a forest that was certified to a sustainable forest management standard [i.e., a sustainable forest management standard published by CSA, Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), or the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC)]."⁷

United States General Services Administration

From its Solicitation for Offers: "For all new installations of wood products, the Lessor is encouraged to use independently certified forest products. For information on certification and certified wood products, refer to the Forest Certification Resource Center (www.certifiedwood.org), the Forest Stewardship Council United States (www.fscus.org), or the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (www.sfiprogram.org)."⁸

Public Works and Government Services Canada

From question and answers: "PWGSC requires all wood products used in its building projects to be certified under one of the three certification systems that operate in Canada: the Canadian Standards Association Sustainable Forest Management Standard, the Forest Stewardship Council's system or the Sustainable Forestry Initiative's system. The department believes all three of these systems effectively promote more sustainable management of Canada's forest resources."⁹

Environment Canada's EcoLogo program

The EcoLogo program website says SFI, CSA and FSC are designed to provide consumers with independent, third-party assurance of sustainable forest management, ethical behaviour and adherence to laws at all points along the product value chain.¹⁰

TerraChoice (part of Underwriters Laboratories Global Network)

The 2010 Seven Sins of Greenwashing report, like the 2009 report, continues to count SFI among a limited list of "legitimate" environmental standards and certifications. SFI, FSC and PEFC, as well as a range of other consumer labels such as EcoLogo, ENERGY STAR, and GREENGUARD, are listed as legitimate environmental standards and certifications.

American Consumer Council

Tom Hinton, President and CEO: "We support the good work of SFI and applaud the positive and progressive things SFI is doing, including these new labels. When it comes to environmentally friendly claims, consumers want to see the proof and not just the sizzle."

Society of American Foresters

Michael Goergen, Executive Vice-President: "The Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Forest Stewardship Council and American Tree Farm System all do an excellent job of making sure products from our forests continue to benefit the environment and our communities. The value of having more than one certification program is that they push each other to improve – and this improves forest management on the ground."

World Business Council for Sustainable Development/World Resources Institute

A toolkit developed to help corporate managers define and implement sound procurement policies for forest products listed positive attributes of SFI procurement objectives, such as delivering credible information about products, showing they come from legal sources, supporting sustainable forest management, and addressing social issues.¹¹

Canadian Institute of Forestry

From an April 2010 letter: "(SFI, CSA and FSC) provide assurances that forest products come from sustainably managed forests. All three standards are applied side by side across Canada's landscape, and increasingly, multiple standards are applied on the same forest areas."¹²

⁷ Environmental Claims: A Guide for Industry and Advertisers www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/02700.html

⁸ Solicitation for Offers (section 7.4): [http://contacts.gsa.gov/webforms.nsf/0/16A3F7C2E0044E4485256F4D00628BE3/\\$file/SFO_09_09.pdf](http://contacts.gsa.gov/webforms.nsf/0/16A3F7C2E0044E4485256F4D00628BE3/$file/SFO_09_09.pdf)

⁹ Public Works and Government Services Canada Questions and Answers <http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/biens-property/questions-eng.html>

¹⁰ Environment Canada Green Buying: Guide to Ecolabels www.ec.gc.ca/education/default.asp?lang=en&n=743D106D-1

¹¹ Sustainable Procurement of Wood and Paper-based Products (2007) www.sustainableforestprods.org/

¹² Canadian Institute of Forestry April 2010 letter www.cif-ifc.org/uploads//Website_Assets/USGB_letter_final.pdf